

Natural Resources Conservation Service efforts in Florida in 2002 centered on work done with our conservation partners. These partnerships included local, state and federal agencies, as well as local conservation districts and private industry. The diversity in Florida’s agriculture mandates that partnerships be as varied as the types of crops and livestock that exist in the state.

2002 was a year of transition. We went from implementation of the 1996 Farm Bill into the 2002 Farm Bill. With an 80% increase in funding for conservation programs, the 2002 Farm Bill presented new challenges. Implementation of the Wetlands Reserve Program, along with the Environmental Quality Incentive Program are excellent examples of how the Natural Resources Conservation Service helped to improve both water quality and quantity for the citizens of Florida. In addition, with an emphasis on improving wildlife habitat for migratory birds as well as native species, NRCS provided a safe sanctuary.

Through strategic management, competitive sourcing, and expanded e-Government, NRCS strove to make our programs and assistance more user friendly to a more diverse population than ever.

Technical assistance was a priority this past year. NRCS provided this assistance to diverse interests such as grazing land for livestock, farmland protection for communities wishing to save open space and programs designed to help the American farmer through cost-share programs to ease the financial burden on those who grow our food and fiber.

We look forward to implementing the 2002 Farm Bill and welcome the challenges that it brings us. With a continued emphasis on partnerships, a strong technical assistance program and dedicated people to carry out these programs, we look forward to 2003.


Niles Glasgow
State Conservationist

A Partnership For Good Stewardship



In Florida, where water is the State’s most critical natural resource, a coalition of conservation partners have

helped landowners voluntarily conserve billions of gallons of water by making sure that their irrigation systems are operating efficiently. Mobile Irrigation Laboratories (MILS) are cooperatively funded by USDA, Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), Water Management Districts, the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services (FDACS), and the Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D) Councils. Since 1986, MILS have actively promoted water conservation throughout the state. The MIL efforts of the five water management districts and NRCS were recognized by the National Irrigation Society. The partnership was awarded the Water Conservation and Energy Award at its national conference in New Orleans.

Year 2002 Program Summary

Florida NRCS employees serve all 67 counties from 39 field offices. Forty-one district conservationists lead the NRCS team within each of the natural resources districts. Staffs are made up of range conservationists, resource and soil conservationists, engineers, soil scientists, soil conservation and engineering technicians, and water management specialists. These employees work hand-in-hand with land users to conserve natural resources on private lands.

This annual report covers one fiscal year, from October 1, 2001 to September 30, 2002. In a few cases, to show trends, data from other years is included. The following are highlights of our annual activities.

Technical Assistance

NRCS employees provided technical assistance to over 80,000 customers last year. The degree of assistance ranged from providing general soils information to designing and applying conservation practices. We helped clients apply

best management practices to reduce erosion on over 27,000 acres. As a result, 287 tons of soil were saved, protecting our water bodies from sedimentation and nutrient loading and the health and productivity of our cropland. NRCS also assisted clients in developing and implementing Irrigation Water Management plans on cropland and urban land. Water management practices were applied on over 54,000 acres, saving 7.5 billion gallons of water. In total, over 127,000 acres of land.

Small Watershed Program

In Florida, NRCS works with the soil and water conservation districts and water management districts on watershed protection projects. The NRCS uses the Small Watershed Program to reduce local flooding problems, help land owners control erosion in high priority watersheds, and improve water quality to Florida’s water bodies and groundwater.

Since 1991, the PL-566 program has been providing cost-share incentives to help Florida’s producers keep animal waste from contaminating the Swannee River Watershed—a major recharge area to the Florida Aquifer. These were the first PL-566 projects in the nation initiated solely for the purpose of groundwater protection. In 2002, NRCS is in the process of developing a watershed plan for the Taylor Creek-Nubbin Slough and the lower Kissimmee basins, through the authority of the Watershed Protection and Flood Prevention Act (PL-566). The plans will focus on implementing conservation practices on grazing lands on cow-calf and dairy operations in order to reduce excess phosphorous loads into Lake Okeechobee. This work will provide for better water quality in Lake Okeechobee, the Everglades National Park and the St. Lucie and Caloosahatchee Estuaries.

In 2002, NRCS trained 27 staff and 76 Technical Service Providers for implementing the conservation provisions of the 2002 Farm Bill. With passage of the Conservation Security and Farmland Protection Act, NRCS has been placed on the forefront of farm bill program implementation and technology leadership. As a result of this training, Florida is well on its way of having a cadre of agency staff and technical service providers certified to provide conservation planning, nutrient management, pest management and comprehensive nutrient management plans for our 2002 Farm Bill participants.

Soil Surveys

Soil scientists in Florida are in the process of updating soil surveys to meet the current needs of users of soil survey information. The updates will comply with the current classification and interpretation standards of the National Cooperative Soil Survey. Soil survey teams have essentially completed work for Pinellas and Swannee Counties. The more up-to-date maps, manuscripts and interpretative data for both counties will eventually be available on hard copy, CDs, and over the Internet. Gadsden and Washington counties are the next priority in 2003.

Resource Conservation and Development (RC&D)

Treasure Coast RC&D was funded by the USDA in January 2002. TCRC&D has signed a contract with the Florida DEP for more than \$188,000 to continue an ongoing citrus irrigation conversion project, which converts flood irrigated citrus to low-volume microjet systems. A total of 1,290 acres of Citrus groves were converted from flood to microirrigation, supplemented by EQIP. A contract has been signed with Florida DEP for 2003 for \$1.4 million to continue the same project. TCRC&D has signed contracts with FDACS and SFWMD totaling more than \$426,346 for Best Management Practice (BMP) to install culverts with flashboard risers increasing water storage in citrus groves.

The Three Rivers RC&D was involved in 17 projects in 2002. These projects include restoration of wildlife habitat, construction of a greenhouse, landscaping a library, improvements to a little league baseball field, water quality projects, dune restoration, monitoring wetlands, greenhouse co-op projects, shrimp production and delivery, museum modernization, the use of Geo Hay as bales, and construction of bluebird houses.

Plant Materials

The Brookville Plant Materials Center serves Florida, the Caribbean area, and coastal areas of Alabama, Georgia and South Carolina. Rainfall varies from 30 to 200 inches per year. Soil textures are predominately sandy and well drained. Elevations vary from sea level to just over 300 feet in Florida and more than 4,000 feet in Puerto Rico. Plant communities are varied and complex. The climate ranges from warm and humid to tropical. Major land uses include row crops, rangland, pasture and haylands,

orchards, forestland, wastewater treatment, recreation and urban areas. Major conservation problems include water quality degradation, soil erosion, water conservation, coastal area erosion (including sand dunes and marshes), and impacts to wildlife habitat. The Brookville center is addressing these problems by using native plants whenever possible to improve forages with pasture and range grasses, improve wildlife habitat, control erosion on cropland, coastal areas and disturbed sites with erosion control plantings, and improve and maintain water quality on wetlands. In 2002, two new species were introduced.

Private Grazing Land Assistance

The state of Florida has over 6 million acres of grazing land. In 2002, the Florida NRCS staff provided technical assistance on 203,178 acres of grazing land. Conservation plans were applied to 342,543 acres and applied prescribed grazing to 253,624 acres. Two demonstration projects were highlighted in 2002. These projects were aimed at improving livestock production efficiency. These projects range from enhancing the management of traditional cow-calf operations to assisting limited resource cooperators implement planned grazing systems. One project involves assisting with the establishment and management of native warm season grasses for forage production. In addition, NRCS assisted four landowners that were participating in the National Forage Quality Improvement Project. NRCS was active in 19 Education and Public Awareness projects as well as six training sessions to improve the ability of landowners, NRCS employees and our partners to develop conservation plans. Other programs included biosecurity methods to prevent the outbreak of contagious diseases, development of Compressive Nutrient Management Plans on grazed dairies, prescribed burning, and preventing the spread of exotic and invasive plants. The 2002 Farm Bill greatly increased the amount of funding toward technical assistance to grazing lands through the Wildlife Habit Incentive Program. NRCS looks forward to implementing the new Grassland Reserve Program in 2003.

Emergency Watershed Protection (EWP)

The EWP provides technical and financial assistance for restoring watersheds ravaged by natural disasters. In 2002, EWP work was done on fourteen sites in five counties. EWP funds

used for financial assistance totaled \$1,508,800 in 2002. There were seven sponsors who participated in these projects. These sponsors consisted of county commissioners and city government officials. These projects consisted of stabilization around bridges, roads and county parks.

Cost-Share Programs

Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP)

NRCS provides technical assistance for farm bill programs. In addition, many state agencies and nonprofit organizations look to NRCS for their conservation cost-share programs. In 2002, EQIP projects included 345 contracts and \$8425,600.

Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP)

WHIP provides technical assistance and cost-share payments to help landowners establish and improve wildlife habitat. WHIP is a voluntary program for people who want to restore or enhance wildlife habit on private land. In 2002, NRCS in Florida completed 27 contracts for a total of \$276,000.

Wetland Reserve Program (WRP)

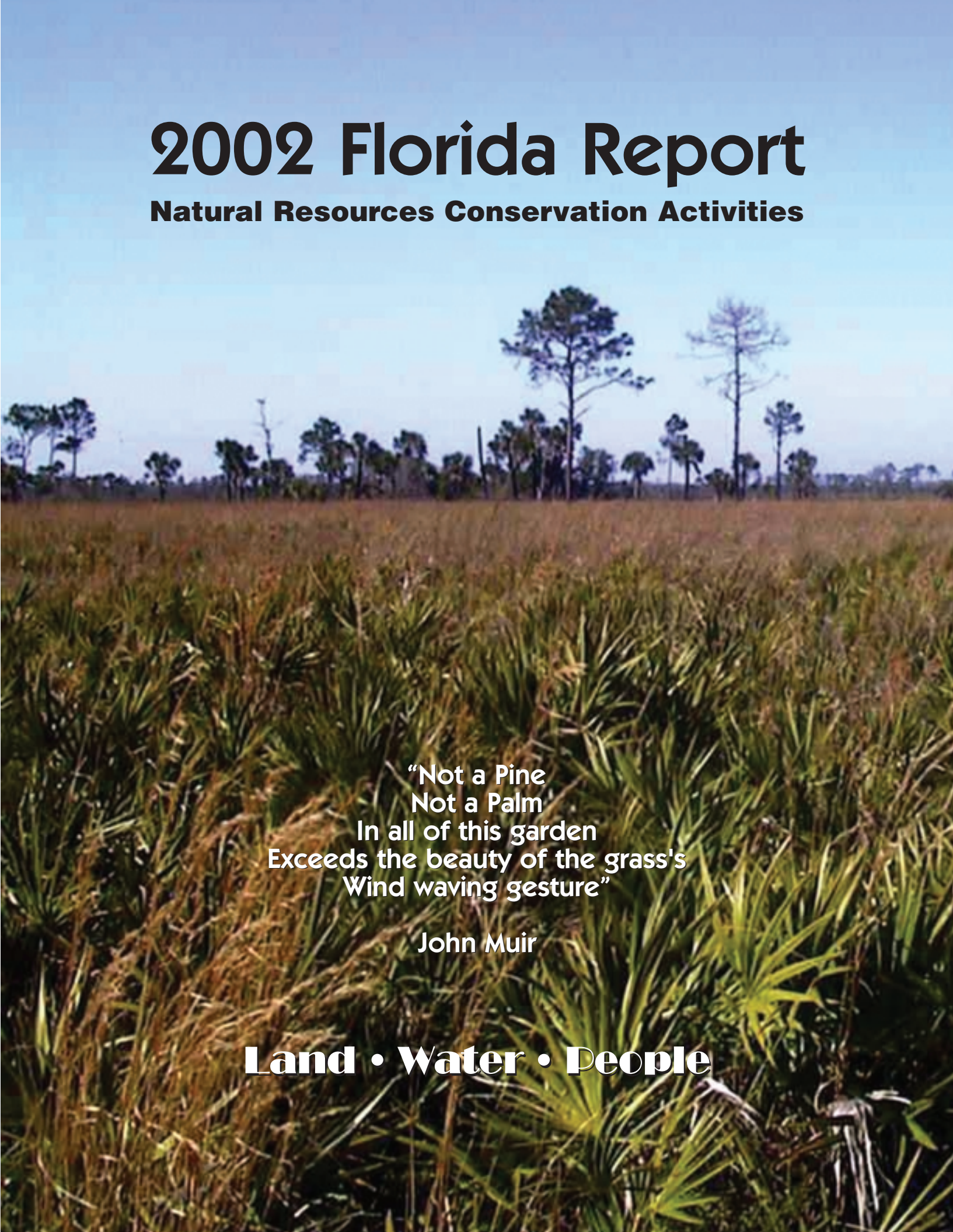
The WRP offers landowners a voluntary land-retirement option to restore or protect wetlands with a permanent easement, a 30-year easement or a restoration cost-share agreement in 2002; Florida enrolled 15,821 acres in WRP. Currently, there are 42 properties enrolled in Florida. Since the program started in June 1998, more than 69,000 acres of wetlands that had their wetland functions reduced or eliminated by agricultural impacts have been protected and are in the process of being restored. The total cost, including easements, closing costs and restoration, is approximately \$80 million. Florida ranks seventh in the nation in WRP acres.

Farmland Protection Program (FPP)

The FPP offers state and local agencies as well as qualified nongovernment organizations an opportunity to apply for cost-share funds to pay for up to 50 percent of the cost of a conservation easement. The FPP conservation easement is intended to keep land in its current agricultural use and prevent conversion of the land to urban uses. In 2002, FPP funds were obligated to purchase a 3,823 acre site in Brevard County.

2002 Florida Report

Natural Resources Conservation Activities



“Not a Pine
Not a Palm
In all of this garden
Exceeds the beauty of the grass's
Wind waving gesture”

John Muir

Land • Water • People